DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 167 877 CG 013 273

AUTHOR Griffith, Albert R.
TITLE Justification for a Black Career Development.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 13p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; *Career Development; *Career Opportunities; Counselor Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Minority Groups; Postsecondary Education; *Racial Discrimination; *Racial Factors; Social Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Studies of the Black experience and its effects on career development and psychosocial identity indicate that: (1) a differential career opportunity structure exists for all people; (2) for Blacks, the real and perceived opportunity structures are qualitatively and quantitatively different from those available to whites; and (3) it is the role of the counselor to encourage Black students to explore careers such as business management which have traditionally had little minority participation. (Author/HLM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

HARD COPY NOT AVAILABLE

ED167877

JUSTIFICATION FOR A BLACK CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Albert R. Griffith, Ed.D. is Program Director of the Minority Counselor Training Program and Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at Boston University. He has primary research interests in career development of minorities and a general interest in minority counseling issues.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

a R Griffith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CG013273

JUSTIFICATION FOR A BLACK CAREER DEVELOPMENT

It is my general purpose here to discuss black career development from a broad perspective. Of particular interest to this article, however, will be a delineation of the black experience in career development terms; in short, the way in which being black affects career development. This issue will be approached both from the ontological perspective of blackness and by examination of the social environment in which blacks must pursue their careers - opportunity structure.

Identity and Separation

To begin with an ontological perspective of the black experience, and in order to arrive at an understanding of black career development, it is important to examine the meaning of blackness as a designation for a racial minority group. To be a member of a racial minority is to possess a shared set of physical characteristics, a common history, but more importantly, to possess a "sense of peoplehood," in Billingsley's (1968) terms. This sense of peoplehood represents in part an affirmative statement of identity, a similarity with a limited set of other persons. It implies commonalities growing out of that set of beliefs. To be Black, therefore, is to possess a specific identity, that identity being a self-affirmation.

While the human condition of blackness incorporates a separate identity partially derived from a sense of peoplehood, this blackness

and minority status exists within a larger context. Bulhan (1977) says that minority status causes a reactive identity, where self-definition occurs in the face of an imposed definition by a different "other" in Fanon's sense (1967) i.e., the larger white society. Reactive identity emerges as a consequence of being separated and of having an African culture modified by a Euro-American experience. In America, the process by which Blacks have been kept apart from the mainstream has historically been the operational definition of racism. Thus, in understanding the black experience in this discussion it becomes necessary to see blacks as having a unique identity, which to greater or lesser degree is self-affirmed, and as having a separateness which is to greater or lesser degree externally imposed.

Differential Opportunities

The nature of the black experience, to the extent that it is influenced by it's interaction with a majority white culture, can in many ways be understood by what has happened to blacks in the market-place - particularly the opportunity for employment. Blacks have lower median income, higher unemployment and employment in less prestigious occupational groups than whites (USDOL, 1975). Blacks are given different opportunities from whites. While some progress can be cited particularly among recent college graduates (Wattenberg and Scammon, 1973) the essential characteristics of the occupational structure in the American workplace have remained remarkably stable over time (Minnell, 1978).

In examining the role of black career behavior, two sociologists, a generation apart, have examined the opportunity structure as portrayed in census data and come to very similar conclusions. Johnson (1935)

looked at the relative concentration of blacks in fewer occupations when compared to whites and concluded that whites too, historically moved from lesser to greater occupational distribution and that, therefore, blacks simply lagged behind whites. In an unacknowledged replication study, Hiestand (1964) reached the same conclusion. These conclusions could simply imply that blacks have retarded career development, if one makes the tenuous assumption that career development represents free choices in the ways individuals relate themselves to the marketplace.

However, historical evidence would seem to give a different perspective. The catering business, now a largely white enterprise, was in colonial and post-colonial America a black enterprise. Hairdressing also was a black enterprise. In the South much of the iron work and creative manual arts now generally called skilled labor were jobs that blacks did (Young, 1972, Birmingham, 1977). The rise of immigration in the North and the labor movement also in the North began an unrelenting prescription of many occupations as "white only jobs" (Hill and Ross, 1965). What we see, then, is a forcing of blacks from many occupations in which they were becoming established into fewer and other jobs that whites had no interest in. These were generally the less competitive, less well-paid and less prestigious occupations. While this historical evidence is somewhat distant, a more immediate argument can be found in the fact that Smith (1977) in his review of the literature found no differences between the occupational aspirations of blacks and those of white children. Furthermore in examining worker satisfaction by race, she did not find blacks more dissatisfied than whites.

The evidence for a separate set of black career behaviors seems

contradictory. On the one hand, there is evidence of deficit, and on the other no evidence of differences between blacks and whites. However, it can be shown that black career development has never been directly or longitudinally studied from a black perspective. Thus all of our current thoughts are based on references gleaned from data not specifically collected to study the black career development process. Moreover, the assumption of free-agency that most career development theories make clearly is not tenable when considering the black experience.

What we are left with is a sound basis for concluding that the opportunity structure is neither uniform across the population or undifferentiated as presented to individuals. The research of Blau and others (1956) confirms this. I would suggest that the opportunity structure can be seen as having three parts: the ideal, perceived and real. The ideal opportunity structure is the American principle of full opportunity. It is the opportunity structure referred to by children and adolescents in their fantasies or fantasy stage (Ginzberg, et. al., 1951, Super, 1957). Next, and later emerging, is the perceived opportunity structure, the subjective perceptions of older adolescents and young adults growing out of observations of parents, adults and peers. It emerges during the exploratory stage. Finally, there is a real opportunity structure which for most people, emerges as less than the ideal but greater than the perceived opportunity structure. It is assumed that most people perceive that they can do fewer things occupationally than they objectively are able to do given the proper resources and occupational information.

I suggest that this differential opportunity structure applies to all

people. The process of choice implies renouncing some ideal opportunity to arrive at a perceived, nearer real opportunity. Nevertheless, for blacks whose careers have to a great extent been delimited by the racism that exists in the marketplace, the notion of a differential opportunity structure has greater meaning. Blacks as do all Americans, as children, believe they can be President. However, during black adolescence perceived opportunity changes drastically for the impoverished black. They become aware of the occupations of individuals in the immediate community. Blacks of all circumstances begin to hear the adult discussions of racism and its effects. To inner city blacks, the world of work is not something to which there is guaranteed entry. If allowed entry, rewards are not assured. Even at more priveleged levels, there is no guarantee of the self-respect that comes from conditions allowing a worker to be the same whole person across times and situations. In short, for Blacks the real and perceived opportunity structures are qualitatively and quantitatively different from those available to whites.

Consequences for Career Development

Having established that the black experience in America as that of a group of people with a self-affirming identity and an imposed separation who are entering the workplace through a delimited opportunity structure, I am now prepared to discuss what should be the concerns of a minority career development as a specific focus within a larger discipline. What will be dealt with here are some of the areas of basic concern that are suggested by minority status and differential opportunity.

What Career Development for Blacks

Given the fact that career development is seen as the systematic

appraisal of the self in career terms and of the environment in occupational opportunity terms (Super, et. al., 1963, Holland, 1973) it becomes necessary to make specific applications to the minority context. In self-appraisal, along with the usual areas of interests, values, and abilities there needs to be added the concept of ethnicity. The degree to which ethnicity plays a role in the occupation that we choose and the manner in which we pursue that choice has cogent and potent meaning for black youth and young adults. Will the person aspire to be a black manager or a manager who happens to be black defines not only what area of management will be pursued but how it will be pursued (Fernandez, 1977). Prior research has shown that among recent college graduates there are very different styles of pursuing a career both among and within races (Griffith, 1974).

It becomes necessary, as objectively as possible, to examine how basically important blackness is to the choosing person. To one individual blackness may be so all embracing a part of identity that everything, including career pursuits, must be dedicated to enhancement of the quality of all black life in America. To another person ethnicity may take only a minor place. To such a person individual competition is the preferred life-style and career choice simply allows opportunity for maximum personal reward. If black career development is to proceed toward greater personal freedom of choice, diversity must not just be tolerated but encouraged.

In examining the social environment focus of career development, the differential opportunity structure, it becomes important to first of all understand that there is a choice to close the gap between perceived and real opportunity. Black workers in most fields now have the option of working in a predominantly black setting or a predominantly

white one. There are not many but some black banks, black insurance companies, black newspapers and black politician's offices. There are more minority public school settings, social service agencies, hospitals and religious institutions. A choice of occupational settings exists and students about to enter the workplace could be encouraged to explore those choices.

The gap between the perceived and real opportunity structures of any given occupations is wide in the inner cities and rural communities. Many technological firms have claimed inability to find black engineers for years. While there have been some program responses to the need, much more occupational information needs to be addressed to students at the junior high school level where math preparation really begins. This task properly done, will prevent the need for massive remediation later. While engineering was the example here, the principle can be applied to all areas of science and technology where youngsters exhibiting potential can be given the supplemental help that will enable them to make a later entry or training choice from a position of readiness.

It has been well established that the single best paying occupational group is business management and proprietorships (Katzenstein, 1972, USDOL, 1975). While preparation for these careers is not well understood and seems to vary greatly, if there is any validity to the notion of achievement motivation or the enterprising type (Holland, 1973) there probably are personality regularities that appear by high school. If that is the case, we need to encourage our young black businesspeople. The single greatest employers of black teenagers I have found are not corporations or institutions but black neighborhood businesses. Their

role must be strengthened for the valuable exposure they give our enterprising youth. Williams (1972) stated some time ago that the building of a black economic superstructure was necessary to black career development. I would argue that black firms with a moral commitment and small white firms that are exempt from affirmative action requirements but accessible to black communities, be engaged as meaningful career exploration sites for black youth. Such exploration means systematic job tryouts rather than a walk-through field trip. This may mean paid or unpaid employment in meaningful work rather than cheap labor. It also means acceptance of personal responsibility by all of society for the persistent increase in black youth unemployment since 1960 (Minnell, 1978).

The interventions I have suggested in self-definition and broadening the perceived opportunity structure are both practical and inexpensive. I make no claim for their sufficiency, just their necessity. However, an additional word to counselors seems appropriate. A concern of some well meaning white counselors has been expressed occasionally. That concern is whether it is wise to encourage black youth to choose occupations for which little historical opportunity for blacks exists. My response is the following:

A. The history of blacks in America has been to prepare for entry into many fields long before there was opportunity. Those who have prepared have often found reasonable alternatives when the opportunities did not seem to immediately exist.

B. Intelligence about the real opportunity structure is limited as to ranges of occupations and options as well as to long-range trends. That this is true for whites makes it even more true for blacks.

C. Counselors should never choose for clients. They should share

the limited information they have, encourage counselees to get more information and facilitate decision making.

D. That the usual predictors of occupational success, ability and interest must give way to effort and luck (the unpredictable) to explain white success. This is even more true of black success.

I conclude by affirming that interventions designed to facilitate acceptance and integration of ethnicity as some part of identity and a systematic closing of the gap between the perceived and real opportunity structures are both achievable and desirable.

References

Billingsley, A. Black families in white America. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Birmingham, S. Certain people. Boston: Little, Brown, 1977.

Blau, P.M., Gustad, J.W., Jeson, R., Parnes, H.S. and Wilcock, R.C. Occupational choice: a conceptual framework. Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 1956, 9, 538-543.

Bulham, H.A. Dialectics of reactive identification and the formation of Afreican intelligentsia. International Social Science Journal, 1977, 29, 149-164.

Fanon, F. Black skin, white masks. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Fernandez, J.P. Black managers in white corporations. New York: Wiley, 1977.

Ginzberg, E., Ginsburg, S.W., Axelrod, S. and Iterman, J.L. Occupational choice. New York: Columbia University, 1951.

Griffith, A.R. Effects of race on the careers of Black college graduates. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Teachers College, Columbia University, 1974.

Hiestand, D.L. Economic growth and employment opportunities for minorities. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Hill, H. and Ross, A. (Eds.) Employment, race and poverty: A critical study of the disadvantaged Negro worker, 1865-1965. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965.

Holland, J. Making vocational choices. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Johnson, C.S. The Negro college graduate: how and where he is employed. J. of Negro Education. 1935, 4, 5-22.

Katzenstein, H. Private and social benefits of the college degree in Black males, 1962-70. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, 1972.

Minell, A.H. The economic experience of Blacks: 1964-1974. New England Economic Review, Jan.-Feb., 1973, 5-18.

Smith, E.J. Work attitudes and job satisfaction of Black workers. Vocational Guidance Quarterly. 1977, 25(3), 252-263.

Super, D.E. The psychology of careers. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.

Super, D.E., Starishevsky, R., Matlin, W. & Jordaan, J.P. Career development: self-concept theory. Princeton, NJ: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963.

U.S. Dept. of Labor Handbook of Labor Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975.

Wattenberg, B. & Scammon, R.M. Black progress and liberal rhetoric. Commentary, 1973, 35-44.

Williams, W.S. Black economic and cultural development. In Jones, R. (Ed.) Black Psychology. NY: Harper & Row, 1972.

Young, C. (Ed.) The Black experience. San Rafael, CA: Leswing, 1972.